

property the root of nearly all our evil and then treats it as a sacred institution; when he pleads for individual liberty and in the same breath for absolute submission to the state; when he preaches tolerance for all men and banishes the atheists from his republic; when he is a proud aristocrat and a pernicious leveller, a reformer looking only backward and a revolutionist afraid to take the first step forward, and a dozen other inconsistent things by fits and starts. To list all of the inconsistencies that have been found in him would at least help us to see how he can be called the father of so many movements in our modern world, however inconsistent these may be in turn. Surely twenty times as many have been traced to him as to any other modern man; but if we can only prove him contradictory enough, we may put them all down to his blame or credit. Yet there are critics with such names as Höffding and Lanson who assure us that Rousseau's work is all a unity, with or without superficial contradictions, that he had a single thought at heart, and that no one but a hasty reader need be led astray by his incidental or apparent inconsistencies. What is it that leaves us in this clash about his meaning?

Or did he have a veritable meaning? Did he own the kind of brain that generates what we call thought? Morley says that Rousseau never rose to 'the distinction of knowing how to think,'¹ in any proper sense, though he indulged a lower form of cerebral performance so important as to ask for ample criticism. But Faguet calls him a 'prodigious thinker'² in a book entitled *Rousseau Penseur*. As a biographer of Burke, Morley knew well that Burke assailed Rousseau largely for his reliance upon logic to clear up the troubles of humanity, and with all its perils logic still passes for a form of thought. But though many a man like Lowell³ has called Rousseau a rigorous logician, many another has answered with Dunning⁴ that we may as well try to 'visualize the fauna of the Apocalypse' as to follow Rousseau's logic. In Morley's mind the answer that Burke gave to Rousseau's 'valueless' speculations is the 'greatest, widest, and loftiest' utterance of all time upon the

¹ *Rousseau*, i. 89.

³ *Literary Essays*, London, 1890, ii. 245.

⁴ *Political Science Quarterly*, xxiv. 3, 385.

² *Rousseau Penseur*, p. 408.

THE MEANING OF ROUSSEAU

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OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON : HUMPHREY MILFORD

1929

194
R863-w
cop. 2

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
AMEN HOUSE, E.C. 4
LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW
LEIPZIG NEW YORK TORONTO
MELBOURNE CAPE TOWN BOMBAY
CALCUTTA MADRAS SHANGHAI
HUMPHREY MILFORD
PUBLISHER TO THE
UNIVERSITY

Printed in Great Britain

PREFACE

IN this little volume I have tried to put down Rousseau's main opinions as a long perusal of his work has led me to believe he meant them. It is surely time we knew his own intention. After all our years of controversy over him we have still no document in English, and but few in any language, that will simply tell us what he meant to say; and in consequence a great deal of our controversy has been over things he never meant at all. If a statement of his meaning may not still the controversy, it may save us at the least from further tilting at the various men of straw who have sprung up in his image. That is all my reason for attempting it.

I could have tried to do an easier thing. It will soon appear that there are reasons in the nature of our author's utterance, and still others in the nature of the criticism that he has encountered, which will make it hard enough to be sure of his meaning at all points. I may therefore have gone wrong in detail, or even upon fundamentals. If so, I shall be the first to welcome a correction. But I would ask a single word of privilege in this regard before beginning. At several points in the following pages I have shown that there are certain passages in Rousseau, often of a rather startling nature, which remain at real or seeming variance with the fundamental meaning I have found throughout his work. If it were not for these passages, indeed, or rather if it were not for the strange interpretations they have all too often suffered, I should never have begun the present essay, for it would have been unnecessary. And while I am freely open to correction, I am fain to hope I may escape a kind of criticism that has already done too much to cloud our author's meaning by only dressing up a few of his auda-

cious flourishes of rhetoric in the guise of his main doctrine. In the effort to find out his doctrine, I have tried to ponder all his work together. If I am in error, I would ask to have it shown by an appeal to all his utterance rather than to an occasional flash of paradox.

I have pleasure in thanking three of my friendly colleagues, Professor Harry Morgan Ayres, Professor Jefferson Butler Fletcher, and Professor Ashley Horace Thorndike, for reading portions of my manuscript and offering welcome criticism.

E. H. W.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY,
20 May 1928.

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Διόπερ πρῶτος ὁ Ζήνων ἐν τῷ Περὶ ἀνθρώπου φύσεως τέλος εἶπε τὸ
ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ κατ' ἀρετὴν ζῆν· ἄγει γὰρ
πρὸς ταύτην ἡμᾶς ἡ φύσις.

Diogenes Laertius, vii. 87.

Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they
have sought out many inventions.

Ecclesiastes, vii. 29.

THE NATURAL MAN

THOUGH the critics have long been busier with our author than with almost any other modern writer, they are still in such dissension as to leave his meaning mainly in the dark. They may have done as ill with other men in former centuries, and for a single instance we may bear in mind how long they managed to keep Aristotle in obscurity and near the verge of travesty. In a similar measure they are now at odds not only on the truth or value of the things that Rousseau said, but even as to what it is he meant to say. And so angry has dissension over him now grown that it is hard to frame a single phrase about his meaning which will be agreeable to all his critics, even as a basis for discussion.

This will be all too apparent as we go on, but a few examples may be given now. Four men out of five will say that when Rousseau tells us to return to nature, he means us to give up all the hard-won gains of culture and get back to savagery or animality. Voltaire implied as much in his ironical confession that Rousseau made him itch to go on all fours; and down to our day a host of critics far less nimble-jointed have kept finding the same admonition in our author and greeting it with every exhibition of amazement, spleen, or horror. But other critics tell us that Rousseau means no such thing; that he never once says it, but repeatedly denies it; and that far from pleading with us to go back to savagery, he is imploring us to press on to a higher culture than any we have known. Why is it that we read such opposite meanings in him?

Because they both are there, say some of the critics, along with many other opposites; because his work is nothing but a quilt of shreds and patches. One of his books, they say, will contradict another, and one page or passage in a single treatise will annihilate the next. And many a critic throws up his hands when Rousseau gives one kind of education to his chosen pupil but prescribes another for the boys of Poland; when he calls